

US, UK plot Libya war escalation

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27 April 2011

The civilian and uniformed chiefs of the US and British militaries met in Washington Tuesday to plot a sharp escalation of the imperialist intervention in Libya. Among the top items on their agenda are plans to continue attempts to assassinate Libyan ruler Muammar Gaddafi by means of a “precision” air strike.

British Defense Secretary Liam Fox and General Sir David Richards, the UK’s chief of defense staff, met at the Pentagon with their American counterparts, Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Admiral Mike Mullen, chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The rare “two-on-two” meeting of these officials underscored the critical state of the intervention by the US and the European powers in Libya, which is now into its sixth week.

There are growing concerns within ruling circles on both sides of the Atlantic that weeks of NATO bombing in support of the anti-Gaddafi regime forces in eastern Libya have succeeded only in creating a military stalemate.

Also weighing on the minds of top officials are the costs of the intervention. According to unofficial estimates in Britain, if it drags on for six months it will deplete Britain’s treasury by approximately £1 billion. On Tuesday, Foreign Secretary William Hague warned the British cabinet that it needed “to prepare for the long haul.”

The US-British war council came just one day after NATO warplanes carried out a strike against the Bab al-Azizyah complex in Tripoli, where Gaddafi lives and works, reducing his offices, library and meeting rooms to rubble. Libyan officials denounced the attack as an assassination attempt and act of state terrorism.

Before leaving Britain, Fox gave a press interview that clearly suggested that assassination will remain a principal tactic in the bid by Washington, London and Paris to engineer “regime change” in Libya.

“If the regime continues to wage war on its people, those who are involved in those command-and-control assets need to recognize that we regard them as legitimate targets,” Fox told the *Daily Mail*.

The *Times* of London cited Defense Ministry aides as saying that one of the main purposes of the trip to

Washington was to “discuss targeting.”

The *New York Times*, meanwhile, published an article Tuesday suggesting that under discussion is both a stepped up effort to murder Gaddafi and plans for a far more devastating bombing campaign against Libya’s infrastructure.

The newspaper quoted Pentagon aides as rejecting the Libyan government’s description of Monday’s air strike on Gaddafi’s compound as an assassination attempt, insisting that it was a “legitimate military target.”

The article, quoting the same Pentagon officials, continued, “For now, they said, the armed Predator drone aircraft being used in Libya have been flying over rebel-held towns that are under attack or are threatened by loyalist forces—not over the capital city.”

The implications are clear, if unstated. The pilotless Predator drones, deployed by the US over Libya last week, have been utilized by the CIA and the Pentagon to carry out assassinations from the air against suspected opponents of US interests in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen and elsewhere. “For now,” according to the Pentagon, they are not flying over Tripoli. Not only could that change, their use for this purpose is undoubtedly part of the discussion on “targeting” taking place between Fox and Gates and their respective senior officers.

The *Times* adds, “The [NATO] alliance is turning to intelligence based on cellular phone and radio intercepts that might indicate which barracks, buildings or compounds are serving as the government’s hidden command posts.” Clearly, such intercepts could also indicate what individuals are present in these facilities, so that they could be targeted for assassination.

More broadly, however, the *Times* report suggests that the change in tactics under discussion between Washington and London calls for far more massive destruction within Libya.

The air strikes being contemplated, the newspaper reports, “are meant to reduce the regime’s ability to harm civilians by eliminating, link by link, the command, communications and supply lines required for sustaining military operations.”

NATO officials are quoted as saying that the bombing campaign is following “a carefully planned step-by-step

progression spanning the front lines, the middle echelons of the supply chain and now the rear areas, mostly in the capital, where the centralized command and control institutions are located.”

The definition of “command and control institutions” appears to be so broad as to include any part of Libya’s government or infrastructure. In addition to targeting Gaddafi’s compound early Monday, NATO also struck at Libya’s state-owned television—a clearly civilian target—forcing it off the air.

Libyan officials have reported that NATO warships have destroyed an undersea cable, cutting off telecommunications between the capital and towns and cities to its east, such as Sirte, Ras Lanuf and Brega. And they said that air strikes hit civilian targets, causing casualties, late Monday in Bir al Ghanam, 60 miles south of the capital, as well as in the Tripoli neighborhood of Ayn Zara.

Gen. John Jumper, who commanded US Air Force units during the US-NATO war against Serbia in 1999—supposedly to protect civilians in Kosovo—told the *Times* that the air war against Libya will be based on “lessons” from this earlier intervention.

The aim of the bombing, he said, was to “bring to a halt the middle-class life in Belgrade”, the Yugoslav capital, with the aim of turning elements within the Serbian regime against President Slobodan Milosevic. That bombing campaign targeted Serbia’s civilian infrastructure, deliberately knocking out electric power and water supplies for the population, wreaking destruction in downtown Belgrade and terrorizing the Serbian people.

Also under discussion between Fox and Gates, according to the British *Guardian*, are proposals to tighten the NATO blockade of the North African country to prevent fuel supplies from reaching Tripoli. While Libya is the largest oil producer on the African continent, it is dependent upon imports for refined products like gasoline and diesel fuel.

The pretense that these actions are being carried out under the mandate of the United Nations Security Resolution 1973 authorizing “all necessary measures” to protect Libyan civilians has become ever more threadbare. Washington, London and Paris have interpreted this language to mean a *carte blanche* to use whatever military force is necessary to bring down the Gaddafi regime and install a puppet state more subservient to the strategic interests of the imperialist powers and the profit interests of the Western energy conglomerates.

Italy is also joining the military assault on Libya, the government of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi announced on Monday. The announcement came barely 10 days after Berlusconi declared that Italy would not use force in Libya. “Considering our geographic position and our colonial

past,” he said on April 15, such military action “would not be understood”.

Italy, both before and during the fascist regime of Benito Mussolini, exercised its colonial rule over Libya through near-genocidal repression of the population, whose numbers were cut in half over the course of three decades.

Having pioneered the use of aircraft to attack civilian populations in Libya—including through the use of poison gas—the Italian military will be at it again, sending its warplanes to bomb Libya.

Berlusconi’s announcement reportedly came after a telephone conversation between him and US President Barack Obama.

Italian Foreign minister Franco Frattini, however, claimed that Italy would be bombing Libya at the request of the Benghazi-based Transitional National Council, whose chief, Mustafa Abd al-Jalil visited Rome last week.

“We know full well that NATO air strikes can cause ‘collateral damage’, there are always civilian casualties in any war,” Frattini quoted Jalil as saying.

He went on to claim the Libyan “rebel” leader had “made a touching speech to Berlusconi”, assuring the Italian prime minister “we will never consider you invaders,” and adding, “We acknowledge the fact that you did not only colonize our country, you also built our country.”

Jalil has reportedly promised the Italian government that all its extensive economic interests, oil and gas contracts and investments in Libya will be protected if NATO succeeds in ousting Gaddafi and replacing it with the self-appointed council.



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